

# METH LABS – What Licensees Need To Know

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October 18  
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## What is methamphetamine and what are its health risks?

- Meth is a synthetic drug. It is a powerful stimulant with long-lasting physical and psychological effects. It has a high potential for abuse and dependence.
- Street names for the drug include: “speed” or “crystal” when it is swallowed or snuffed, “crank” when it is injected and “ice” when it is smoked.
- It is sold as pills, capsules, powder or chunks. The powder can be white, yellow, brown or even green.
- Approximately 30 to 40 percent of the supply is made in hidden labs – usually in rural areas – but it can be made anywhere.

## Why is meth so dangerous?

- Meth labs can be dangerous because people, often under the influence of the drug, are handling a variety of potentially explosive chemicals. (Fires and explosions are commonplace)
- Making any quantity of meth produces at least five times that amount in toxic wastes that are routinely dumped into the environment, contaminating septic tanks with dangerous waste and chemically contaminating drain fields, soil, and surface waters.
- Over six months of use, 94% of those who smoke meth will become addicted to the drug.
- Often children are present at meth lab sites.
- Meth use often leads to paranoia and violent behavior. A user is most dangerous when they take more and more meth to avoid crashing. At this point taking more meth doesn't stop the crash and it is not uncommon for the abuser to become violent.

## How to recognize a meth lab



- Chemical smells like ether, ammonia, acetone or cat urine
- Heavy traffic during late night hours
- Covered windows and reinforced doors
- Inhabitants smoking outside the building (concern about fumes)
- Discarded containers, empty ephedrine bottles, stained coffee filters, lithium batteries, discarded propane tanks

**Never use a discarded propane tank – they are often used to store anhydrous ammonia**

## Possible health effects

- The risk of injury from chemical exposure depends on the chemical itself, the concentration, quantity and length and route of exposure.
- Chemicals may enter the body by being breathed, eaten, injected (by a contaminated needle or accidental skin prick, or absorbed by the skin).
- An acute chemical exposure is one that occurs over a relatively short period of time and may result in health effects. This could occur during or immediately after a drug bust, before the lab has been ventilated.
- An acute exposure to high levels of contaminants found in meth labs cause shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, dizziness, lack of coordination, chemical irritation, burns to the skin, eyes, mouth and nose, and in severe cases – death.

## Recommendations

- No one should enter a place that has been used as an illegal methamphetamine drug lab without appropriate personal protective equipment unless the area has been ventilated and decontaminated.
- No one should rent, purchase or otherwise occupy a house or dwelling, which has been used as an illegal drug lab until the property has been decontaminated according to the best available technology. However small amounts of contaminants can remain on floors, walls, counters, carpets, furniture, sinks, drains and ventilation systems. Exposure to even small amounts of some of these chemicals can pose serious health risks.
- The decision to rent, purchase or otherwise occupy a house or dwelling which has been used as a drug lab should be made with the knowledge that no decontamination procedure can guarantee absolute safety for reoccupancy.